Autocrats' Dilemma: The Dual Impacts of Village Elections on Public Opinions in China[1]

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Abstract

How do authoritarian elections affect voters' attitudes toward the regime and their support for democracy? Drawing upon the case of village elections in China, this paper argues that elections may have two simultaneous effects on voters' political attitudes. First, free and fair elections tend to elevate ordinary citizens' confidence in the government. Second, elections also provide voters with a platform to exercise political rights and accumulate democratic experience through participation, which in turn triggers greater demand for further empowerment. Using data from a two-round nationwide survey conducted in 114 villages, the empirical analysis of the paper confirms both effects. One implication of these findings is that authoritarian elections may simultaneously strengthen mass support for the regime and trigger greater public demand for further democratization.

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Although elections have long been regarded as the hallmark of democracy, a large and increasing number of authoritarian states also hold competitive presidential, legislative and/or sub-national elections.[1] Scholars disagree about the role of elections in authoritarian regimes.[2] Conventional wisdom tends to view elections as incompatible with authoritarian regimes since they undermine such regime's ideological foundation, liberalize organized opposition, and trigger greater popular demand for political rights.[3] In contrast, a recent literature on competitive authoritarianism begins to emphasize the regime-stabilizing effects of elections. For example, some scholars argue that regular and relatively free elections may enable regime leaders to identify potential oppositions and credibly share office spoils among members of the ruling coalition.[4] Others focus more on legislative elections and view them as a useful institutional tool to co-opt powerful opposition groups.[5]

Despite these fruitful achievements, existing studies on both sides of the debate tend to focus on the interaction between electoral institutions and political

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[1] This paper downplays the conceptual distinction among various kinds of authoritarian regimes. This could be an innocuous simplification since this research does not touch upon the differences in either organizational structure or elite relationship among types of authoritarian regimes.

[2] Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Ccompetitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002); Beatriz Magaloni, "The Game of Electoral Fraud and the Ousting of Authoritarian Rule," *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 3 (2010); Andreas Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002).

[3] Guillermo A. O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, *Transitions from authoritarian rule : prospects for democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Minxin Pei, "How will China democratize?," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 3 (2007).

[4] Gary Cox, "Authoritarian elections and leadership succession, 1975-2000," *Working Paper* (2007); Barbara Geddes, "Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?," *Working Paper* (2006); Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Beatriz Magaloni, "Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 4-5 (2008).

[5] Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Coperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion under Dictatorships," *Economics & Politics* 18, no. 1 (2006); Joseph Wright, "Do Authoritarian Institutions Constrain? How Legislatures Affect Economic Growth and Investment," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2008).

elites while overlooking the potential impact of elections on ordinary citizens' political attitudes. In particular, it remains unclear whether elections would increase regime legitimacy in the eyes of voters or trigger greater social demand for further empowerment and regime change. Research based on democratic countries has associated fair and transparent elections with strong public support for both the elected government and the democratic institution in general.[6] However, little evidence exists about whether the same logic holds for non-democratic regimes, in which elections are set up by governments that do not conform to democratic principles in many respects. Given the potential contradiction between government support and preference for democracy, it is theoretically intriguing to ask how elections affect public opinions in an authoritarian context.[7]

This paper attempts to fill in this lacuna in the literature by studying authoritarian elections from a public opinion perspective. More specifically, it aims to explore whether and how elections affect ordinary voters' trust in the government and their support for democracy. The analysis focuses on these two political attitudes because of their widely recognized importance in the dynamic of modern regimes. Under established or transitioning democracies, confidence in the elected government and public support for democratic institutions are both crucial to the process of

[6] Sarah Birch, "Electoral institutions and popular confidence in electoral processes: A cross-national analysis," *Electoral Studies* 27, no. 2 (2008). Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, "The Politics and Economics of Democratic Commitment: Support for Democracy in Transition Societies," *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 4 (1995).

[7] Lianjiang Li, "Distrust in Government Leaders, Demand for Leadership Change, and Preference for Popular Elections in Rural China," *Political Behavior* (2010).

political legitimization and democratic consolidation.[8] The two political attitudes are also important for non-democratic regimes. On the one hand, the lack of public confidence in the ruling regime may trigger individual and collective contentious behaviors thereby increasing the risk of regime breakdown, as illustrated by the collapse of East European communist regimes in early 1990s and the more recent political turmoil in the Middle East. This being the case, measures that are able to boost public confidence in government should be conducive to the longevity of the authoritarian rule. From another perspective, modernization theory suggests that the accumulation of social support for representative institutions may lead to a pro-democratic political culture, which increases people's psychological and behavioral tendency to pursue political rights and liberty and in the long run destabilizes the authoritarian rule.[9]

I propose two hypothesized effects of authoritarian elections, namely "trust enhancing effect" and "democratic training effect", on citizens' political attitudes. More specifically, "trust enhancing effect" means that by setting up relatively free and fair elections, authoritarian governments can gain greater public confidence, while

[8] Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The civic culture; political attitudes and democracy in five nations* (Princeton, N.J.,: Princeton University Press, 1963). Marc J. Hetherington, "The Political Relevance of Political Trust," *The American Political Science Review* 92, no. 4 (1998); Marc J. Hetherington, *Why trust matters : declining political trust and the demise of American liberalism* (Princeton, NJ ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005). Samuel P. Huntington, *The third wave : democratization in the late twentieth century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Pamela Waldron-Moore, "Eastern Europe at the Crossroads of Democratic Transition," *Comparative Political Studies* 32, no. 1 (1999).

[9] Lawrence E. Harrison, *Who prospers? : how cultural values shape economic and political success* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992); Huntington, *The third wave : democratization in the late twentieth century*; Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *The American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959); Christian Welzel and Ronald Inglehart, "The Role of Ordinary People in Democratization," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 1 (2008).

"democratic training effect" argues that elections also provide voters with a platform to accumulate democratic experience through participation, which in turn increases their democratic consciousness and demand for further improvement in political rights. To test these arguments, I draw on the case of village elections in China. Empirical analysis based on a nationwide survey confirms both effects, suggesting that authoritarian elections do not affect state-society relations and regime stability in a unidirectional way; rather, elections may simultaneously consolidate the authoritarian rule and trigger greater public demand for further democratization of the regime.

The paper also contributes the existing discussion on the development of grassroots democracy in China. Survey-based studies have established that village elections are useful to induce accountability of village officials and improve village governance.[10] However, whether elections also shape voters' attitudes to governments that set up and control these elections remains an unsolved puzzle. As far as the political impacts of these elections are concerned, it is argued that they have contributed to the improvement of civil consciousness and political efficacy among rural residents.[11] Do these changes in political awareness also result in stronger support for further democratization of the regime? By answering these questions, this

[10] Melanie Manion, "The Electoral Connection in the Chinese Countryside," *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (1996); Melanie Manion, "Democracy, Community, Trust: The Impact of Elections in Rural China," *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006). John J. Kennedy, Scott Rozelle, and Yaojiang Shi, "Elected Leaders and Collective Land: Farmers' Evaluation of Village Leaders' Performance in Rural China," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 9, no. 1 (2004); Yan Shen and Yang Yao, "Does grassroots democracy reduce income inequality in China?," *Journal of Public Economics* 92, no. 10-11 (2008). For a different view, see Lily L. Tsai, *Accountability without democracy : solidary groups and public goods provision in rural China* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[11] Kevin J. O'Brien, "Villagers, Elections, and Citizenship in Contemporary China," *Modern China* 27, no. 4 (2001); Lianjiang Li, "The Empowering Effect of Village Elections in China," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 4 (2003).

paper also deepens our understanding of the village elections in China and their potential political consequences.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: The next section briefly introduces village elections in China. Then following the existing literature on electoral authoritarianism, I propose two hypotheses regarding the impacts of elections on voters' political trust and support for democracy. Section four describes the survey data, the coding rule for key variables and the specification of the statistical model. Then I report and interpret the major findings, followed by a concluding remark.

The Institution of Village Elections in China

Village elections in China first emerged in early 1980s, immediately after the commencement of economic reform in the rural area. The following two decades have witnessed the development of this village-level democratic institution, as elected villagers' committees gradually replaced the appointed village governments and became the locus of power in a majority of villages across the country. A typical villagers' committee is composed of three to five officials, normally a chair, several deputy chairs and an accountant. The passage of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees in 1998 was a milestone in the history of village elections. The law for the first time required that officials in a villagers' committee must be elected through competitive elections every three years. It also stipulated that each adult individual in the village should have the right to vote, to nominate others and to be nominated as candidates. Since then the development of grassroots democratic institutions in rural China seems to have become consolidated and irreversible.

Despite the absence of party competition, Chinese village elections embrace limited but genuine contestation for offices. They are more than the "window-dressing" exercise commonly existing in elections held by communist states. The number of candidates must exceed the number of seats available. Candidates, even if they are Party members and/or sponsored by the local authority, lose elections routinely, leading to frequent alternations of village leadership. Mobilization for electoral support by candidates through public and private means is fairly common in many cases. Neither are village elections illusions of participation exploited by the ruling regime to signal political power. In the majority of cases, villagers are not compelled to vote and enjoy the freedom to vote for those they sincerely support. Observing these features, Landry and coauthors portray village elections as "competition without parties".[12]

However, Chinese village elections still occur within a single-party polity and therefore face important structural restrictions. First, they are set up and promoted by the party-state mainly as an institutional tool to maintain stability rather than a sincere commitment to democracy.[13] The historical origin of village elections can be traced back to the chaotic decade of the Cultural Revolution. which drastically undermined the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the grassroots level. As the People's Commune system collapsed and the state's control over rural communities weakened, the loss of legitimacy began to trigger extensive mass

[12] Pierre F. Landry, Deborah Davis, and Shiru Wang, "Elections in Rural China: Competition Without Parties," *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 6 (2010): 763.
[13] Elizabeth Perry J. and Merle Goldman, "Introduction: Historical Reflections on Grassroots Political Reform in China," in *Grassroots Political Reform in Contemporary China*, ed. Elizabeth Perry J. and Merle Goldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

discontent and disorder in the countryside. Meanwhile, the Party's personnel control in the local area was also deteriorating. Many village officials were coming to doubt whether the benefits of being a village official exceeded the cost.[14] Under such circumstances, how to rebuild public order and maintain the authoritarian rule in the countryside became a political imperative the central leaders of the country had to face. Realizing the problem, Chinese leaders decided to introduce competitive elections into rural communities, hoping that the partial devolution of political and policy-making power would protect the regime from the threat of eruptive social challenges.[15]

The second structural restriction village elections have been facing lies in the constant interference from local agents of the state. State officials, particularly at the township level, often seek to tailor the procedures, manipulate the processes and tamper the results of elections.[16] They may directly nominate candidates and bluntly block the participation of candidates whom they regard as troublemakers. They also mobilize or even coerce party members to vote for government-sponsored candidates. In other cases, officials simply stuff the ballot boxes or change the votes secretly. Even if their favorite candidates lose the election, they may still declare the result invalid due to voting irregularities or illegal vote buying.

Local officials are motivated to intervene in village elections for a variety of causes, including pursuing private gains, promoting local economic and fiscal

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[14] Kevin J. O'Brien, "Implementing Political Reform in China's Villages," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 32 (1994).
[15] Xu Wang, "Mutual empowerment of state and peasantry: Grassroots democracy in rural China," *World Development* 25, no. 9 (1997).
[16] Thomas Bernstein, "Village Democracy and Its Limits," *ASIEN* 99(2006)

interests or fulfilling upper-level policy targets such as social stability.[17] Any of these causes would require officials manipulating elections and placing people they trust to the positions of village leadership. Since the Organic Law fails to specify many institutional details regarding how elections should be held as well as the boundary of the role local authorities should play in them, plenty of room is left for township officials to intervene. Villagers may challenge electoral misconducts, but it is often a bitter road. In the absence of an independent judicial system, any suit against electoral fraud from villagers has to go through a long administrative process, which proves to be both painful and unpromising in practice.

The coexistence of democratic features and authoritarian elements is constantly shaping voters' attitudes toward the institution of elections and toward the regime. On the one hand, elections have greatly increased ordinary villagers' political awareness and democratic consciousness. More and more villagers have come to believe that elections are the best way of selecting village leaders and exercising governance.[18] On the other hand, fraud, corruption and scandals involving elections have been undermining villagers' satisfaction with the local party-state as well as their confidence in the grassroots democratic institution itself. For example, some voters who have experienced electoral corruption tend to view elections as a game played by officials and village elites only and of no use for ordinary villagers. As a result, they

[17] For a more detailed discussion on the motivations of local officials, see Birney, Mayling. "Decentralization and Veiled Corruption under China's 'Rule of Mandates'." *World Development* (forthcoming) and Su, Fubing, Ran Tao, Xin Sun, and Mingxing Liu. "Clans, Electoral Procedures and Voter Turnout: Evidence from Villagers' Committee Elections in Transitional China." Political Studies 59, no. 2 (2011): 432-57.

[18] Wang, "Mutual empowerment of state and peasantry: Grassroots democracy in rural China."

may form stronger resentment to local authorities and pursue more contentious strategies to voice their discontent or demands. In the next section, I will review the relevant theoretical and empirical literature and propose two theoretical hypotheses regarding the impacts of elections on voters' political attitudes for empirical tests.

Evaluating the Political Impacts of Authoritarian Elections: Theoretical Hypotheses

Under democracy, elections with greater procedural justice are often associated with stronger public support for the elected government. However, whether the same relationship also holds in an authoritarian context remains unclear in theory. One reason for this indetermination is that, unlike their democratic counterparts, authoritarian governments are often not restricted by the election they set up, or are able to sabotage effective electoral competition. Unsurprisingly, many scholars view authoritarian elections as no more than a self-legitimization process organized by dictators.[19] Even in places where limited electoral competition among parties exists, authoritarian governments can easily achieve victory by relying on electoral fraud, vote buying and patronage networks.[20] The rigged nature of authoritarian elections raises questions to their utility in inducing public support for the regime.

Instead of viewing elections as a facade of representation, a recent strand of literature began to reexamine the role of elections in authoritarian regimes and to emphasize their implications for government policy and social welfare. One important

[19] Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is ruled*, Rev. ed., Russian Research Center studies, (Cambridge, Mass.,: Harvard University Press, 1963); Richard Rose, "Learning to support new regimes in Europe," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 3 (2007).

[20] Lisa Blaydes, "Who Votes in Authoritarian Elections and Why? Determinants of Voter Turnout in Contemporary Egypt," *Working paper* (2006); Ellen Lust-Okar, "Elections under authoritarianism: Preliminary lessons from Jordan," *Democratization* 13, no. 3 (2006).

finding produced by this endeavor suggests that the need for mobilizing electoral support may push authoritarian rulers to hold at least limited downward responsiveness and accountability that may stabilize the authoritarian rule.[21] The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of Mexico, for example, distributed public goods through the poverty relief program *Pronasol* to acquire electoral support.[22] Pepinsky found similar evidence in Malaysia.[23] In Vietnam, congress delegates subject to local elections with free and fair procedures of nomination and vote are more likely to criticize authorities and more responsive to the needs of local constituents.[24]

Village elections in China also provide support to the above functional view of authoritarian elections. Existing studies have related elections to better public goods and services, less administrative corruption and less government predation in Chinese villages.[25] As a consequence, elections have to some extent improved the relationship between local state authorities and residents in rural China. Drawing on case studies and interviews, Schubert finds that voting in direct elections provides villages with a previously unavailable channel of political participation as well as some policy

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[21] Raj M. Desai, Anders OlofsgÅRd, and Tarik M. Yousef, "THE LOGIC OF AUTHORITARIAN BARGAINS," *Economics & Politics* 21, no. 1 (2009); Jennifer Gandhi, *Political institutions under dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[22] Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*.

[23] Thomas Pepinsky, "Autocracy, Elections, and Fiscal Policy: Evidence from Malaysia," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 42, no. 1/2 (2007).

[24] Edmund Malesky and Paul Schuler, "Nodding or Needling: Analyzing Delegate Responsiveness in an Authoritarian Parliament," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (2010).

[25] Birney, "China's Village Elections as a Mechanism for Political Stability Via Bounded Political Responsiveness."; Kennedy, Rozelle, and Shi, "Elected Leaders and Collective Land: Farmers' Evaluation of Village Leaders' Performance in Rural China."; Manion, "The Electoral Connection in the Chinese Countryside."; Manion, "Democracy, Community, Trust: The Impact of Elections in Rural China."; Shen and Yao, "Does grassroots democracy reduce income inequality in China?."; Monica Martinez-Bravo et al., "Do Local Elections in Non-Democracies Increase Accountability? Evidence from Rural China," *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series* No. 16948(2011).

influence in their communities, which reduce villagers' tendency to challenge the local state.[26] In other words, village elections may become a layer of lubricant between the authoritarian state and the masses and thus protected the former from eruptive collective challenges.

Beside policy and welfare consequences, elections also grant citizens of authoritarian countries limited political freedom. By organizing periodic elections, authoritarian rulers are able to present themselves as proponents of more fundamental and meaningful political reforms. Noting this, Schedler wrote: "by opening the peaks of state power to multiparty elections, electoral authoritarian regimes establish the primacy of democratic legitimation. . . regimes institute the principle of popular consent, even as they subvert it in practice."[27] Myanmar's legislative election in 2010 provides an illustrating case of the legitimacy-enhancing function of elections. Ang San Suu Kyi, the leader of the country's largest oppositional party, encouraged opposition leaders to boycott the election because she believed participation by any opposition figures would lend legitimacy to a process that was designed to entrench the military regime of the country.[28] Suu Kyi's concern clearly reflects the potential utility of elections in boosting public support for authoritarian governments.

The political rights and governance-improving effects associated with elections may boost ordinary citizens' confidence in the ruling regime, despite the latter's authoritarian nature. However, such an effect is conditional on the premise

[26] Gunter Schubert, "Village Elections, Citizenship and Regime Legitimacy in Contemporary Rural China," in *Regime Legitimacy in Contemporary China: Institutional Change and Stability*, ed. Thomas Heberer and Gunter Schubert (London: Routledge, 2009).
[27] Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation," 13.
[28] "Suu Kyi Allies Plan to Take Myanmar Parliament Seats", the Wall Street Journal, Nov, 17, 2010

that elections satisfy a minimal level of democratic standard and achieved an effective level of competition. In particular, the procedures, processes and results of elections should be free of interference from the ruling governments and politicians. Unfortunately, illegal manipulation by authoritarian rulers and their agents is a common practice in authoritarian elections, which would undoubtedly undermine the public confidence in the regime. Elections in Mexico under the PRI clearly illustrated the above argument. Before the early 1980s, the PRI was almost unchallenged in national and sub-national elections and the party's main strategy was mobilizing electoral support using redistribution and state patronage rather than rigging elections. During this period, elections basically played the role of strengthening the hegemonic-party rule. However, things changed in the 1980s when unprecedented challenges from other political parties emerged. Facing these challenges, the PRI was forced to manipulate elections in favor of its own candidates. Although the Party successfully maintained its leadership in the 1988 presidential election, public confidence in it declined rapidly after the disclosure of a series of electoral frauds, which eventually led to its defeat in the following election. Interviews with Chinese rural residents also suggest that rigged elections have detrimental effects on villagers' trust in not only village leaders but also the local authority. Experiencing electoral frauds often causes villagers' discontent with the local government, particularly when local officials are also responsible for electoral misconducts. For example, one respondent in Jilin complained about the excessive inference of upper-level officials in village elections and asserted that these behaviors dramatically ruined the prestige

of the local government.[29] Respondents in a village of Sichuan also expressed strong discontent with the township officials who vetoed their elected VC Chair, called for a reelection and eventually altered the electoral outcome.[30] Based on the above analysis, I propose the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 1 (Trust Enhancing Effect)*:** compared with manipulated ones, free and faire elections induce stronger public confidence in the authoritarian government.

If authoritarian elections help incumbent rulers establish trust among citizens, do they necessarily hurt the latter's democratic consciousness and therefore their preference for further democratization? My answer is no, because free and fair elections and the interest representation embedded in the institution can produce positive perceptions of democratic institutions among voters, which may contribute to the formation of democratic values in authoritarian societies. Existing studies have established two theoretical accounts for the positive effect of elections on citizens' support for democracy. First, elections provide voters with the right to choose or oust public officials, to determine policies and to express themselves on political issues. This classic political freedom itself is an important merit voters may appreciate independent of the political and economic consequences of elections.[31] Second, democracy requires a long learning process, in which repeated participation can deepen a person's skills, interest, and efficacy and elevate his or her support for

[29] Interview conducted in Jilin, September 2007
[30] Interview conducted in Sichuan, September 2008
[31] Evans and Whitefield, "The Politics and Economics of Democratic Commitment: Support for Democracy in Transition Societies."

democracy.[32] While most works in this vein focus on transitioning countries, I believe both accounts also apply to authoritarian countries and to China in particular. In the past two decades, residents of Chinese villages participated in elections every three years, practiced how to nominate candidates and cast ballots, and learned how to use elections as a weapon to punish inadequate officials. This regular interaction with democratic institutions has remarkably promoted voters' civil consciousness and political efficacy.[33] In addition, elections also encourage villagers to pursue further democratic rights. After two decades of democratic training, some villagers now hope elections to be held for township and county governments.[34]

What voters can learn from elections also depends on the extent to which these elections are free of illegal intervention from non-democratic forces, especially the ruling elites of the authoritarian regime and their local agents. This is because while voters' positive evaluation of electoral quality can boost their support for democratic institutions and encourage their participatory behaviors, unjust electoral procedures or outcomes will produce a negative perception of democracy among voters and erode their confidence in the representative political institution. Interviews with Chinese villagers confirm this argument. Dissatisfied with the election in his village, one villager stated "our election was such a mess… the former chair bought off electoral committee members and put every electoral procedure under his control, while others

[32] Robert Mattes and Michael Bratton, "Learning about Democracy in Africa: Awareness, Performance, and Experience," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007); Rose, "Learning to support new regimes in Europe."
[33] Li, "The Empowering Effect of Village Elections in China."; O'Brien, "Villagers, Elections, and Citizenship in Contemporary China."
[34] Jamie P. Horsley, "Village Elections: Training Ground for Democratization," *China Business Review* 28, no. 2 (2001); Daniel Kelliher, "The Chinese Debate over Village Self-government," *China Journal* 37(1997).

had no chance of winning at all. I don't think elections are suitable for us."[35] Clearly, unfair procedures and extensive frauds are ruining the perception of elections by Chinese rural residents.

Hypothesis 2 (Democratic Training Effect): free and fair elections also increase voters' support for democracy, while manipulated ones tend to undermine the public preference for the representative political institution.

Combining the two effects, I argue that elections may simultaneously elevate public confidence in the regime and nurture a pro-democratic cultural environment. The experience of village elections in Sichuan provides an illustration of the dual effects and also facilitates the causal inference. As a vanguard of local political reform, Sichuan used to have high-quality elections at the village level from the late 1990s to the mid 2000s. During this period, reformists in the provincial government not only promoted village democracy; they also attempted to advance direct elections up to the township level.[36] These reform initiatives triggered great enthusiasm from local residents, as demonstrated by villagers' very active participation in local elections.[37] However, the development of grassroots democracy in Sichuan was reversed in late 2005, when the Party center urged the Sichuan provincial Party committee to tighten control over local elections under the concern that too much liberalization might cause political instability.[38] As table 3 shows, the quality of village elections in Sichuan experienced a significant deterioration between the two election years. Given this

[35] Interview conducted in Hebei, June 2008.
[36] Lianjiang Li, "The Politics of Introducing Direct Township Elections in China," *The China Quarterly* 171(2002).
[37] Youxing Lang and Baogang He, "Buyun Dilemma: An Exploration of Direct Downship Elections in China [Buyun kunjing: Zhongguo xiangzhen zhang zhijie xuanju kaocha]," *21th Century [Ershiyi Shiji]*, no. 4 (2001).
[38] Interview conducted in Sichuan, July 2006

largely exogenous change, the Sichuan case therefore can be viewed as a quasi-experiment to explore the effect of elections on voters' political attitudes. Our interviews in Sichuan suggested that voters displayed considerable discontent with the 07/08 elections. Some complained about the increasing interference of township officials in village affairs compared with before, while others expressed low confidence over the utility of elections. One retired village official suggested that people in his village became less enthusiastic in participating elections; only a few villagers showed up to vote in the election while others simply asked others to vote on their behalf.[39] Our 2008 survey also tentatively suggests that respondents in Sichuan province report a lower level of trust in local governments than three years ago.[40]

Students of village elections have long noticed the complex impacts of the representative institution on voters' political attitudes. For example, Landry and colleagues commented, "contested elections in authoritarian regimes may simultaneously strengthen demand for accountability and loyalty to the regime".[41] Kennedy also made a similar argument.[42] In the next section, I use survey data from 114 Chinese villages to conduct a direct test of the two hypothesized effects.

Statistical Analysis

[39] Interview conducted in Sichuan, September 2008

[40] Lacking comparable measures in our 2005 survey, I cannot rigorously show that political trust and support for further democratization were decreasing during the period. However, just to provide one piece of tentative evidence, the 2005 survey did ask respondents whether they thought "township and county government policies truly care for the interest of peasants". About 65% of the interviewees in Sichuan offered a positive response, while the proportion of trustful respondents in the 2008 survey was only 50%.

[41] Pierre F. Landry, Deborah Davis, and Shiru Wang, "Elections in Rural China: Competition Without Parties," *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 6 (2010): 763.

[42] John J. Kennedy, "Legitimacy with Chinese Characteristics: 'two increases, one reduction'," *Journal of Contemporary China* 18, no. 60 (2009).

The data I use to test the above hypotheses comes from a two-round nationwide survey conducted in 120 Chinese villages from six provinces in 2005 and again in 2008 by the same research team. The survey employed a standard multi-stage clustered sampling method to select individual respondents (Appendix A describes the sampling process in greater details). In each round, the survey randomly selected three to five village officials and 25 ordinary villagers. Interviewers asked village officials to collectively recall the electoral procedures adopted in the most recent VC elections and then verify this information with selected villager respondents. For villagers, the survey collected information including their demographic characteristics, voting behaviors in recent elections and a wide range of political attitudes. Since the two rounds of the survey interviewed different sets of respondents, I only use the individual-level data from the 2008 survey, which enables me to use indicators of electoral quality in lagged terms. The two rounds of the survey overlap in 114 villages, resulting in a sample of 2272 villagers in the overlapping villages after invalid responses are eliminated.[43] Thus, the data used in the following analysis represents the 2272 villagers from the 114 villages.

Support for Democracy

The dependent variable I use to capture the democratic training effect of elections is voters' support for democracy. I measure this political attitude using the survey question "in your opinion, what is the best way to select local government leaders at the county and township levels." The options are: 1=appointed by superiors; 2=

[43] For reasons including weather and traffic conditions and thwart by the local mafia, the second round of the survey team failed to reach six villages visited in the first round.

indirectly elected by villagers' representatives; 3=directly elected through popular elections.[44] The order of these options reflects the strength of the respondent's demand for further democratic reforms of the regime and thereby his/her support for democracy.[45]

Asking respondents to choose their preferred methods to select county and township government leaders is an appropriate measure for villagers' support for democracy for two reasons.[46] First, the indicator is constructed based on the two defining features of democracy, namely contestation for offices and universal suffrage.[47] The value 1 indicates that the interviewed respondent supports neither electoral contestation nor public participation in the selection of local government leaders, while the value 3 indicates that he or she favors both. The value 2 represents

[44] An "I don't care" option is also included for respondents who are uninterested in politics. Since forcing these respondents to choose an answer may probably induce cursory responses, the survey allows respondents to choose not answering to reduce measurement error. For theoretical foundation of this treatment, see John Brehm, *The phantom respondents : opinion surveys and political representation*, Michigan studies in political analysis (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

[45] Strictly speaking, administrative leaders and party secretaries at both the township and the county level are in principle subject to approval by local congress representatives. This approval process is non-competitive since only one candidate is nominated. However, some respondents may confuse the approval procedure with indirect elections by villagers' representatives (value 2 of the dependent variable), depending on their political awareness and positions in local politics (e.g. local congress representatives). To address this concern, I also generate a binary variable in which direct elections by one person one vote equal one and all other options equal zero as the dependent variable. It turns out that this new approach does not change the main findings in any meaningful way.

[46] The indicator used here is different from those widely used in public opinion surveys in established democracies, such as ANES, or in surveys for cross-national comparison, such as the Barometer Surveys. For example, in the New Europe Barometer Surveys, respondents' support for democracy is measured by the type of regime they perceive as most ideal for their own countries. Similarly, the World Value Survey asks respondents the extent to which they think democracy is a good way of governing their own countries. Although widely used in surveys in democratic contexts, the wording of these questions may be too abstract and ambiguous for Chinese villagers, who have little experience of democracy. In China, the CCP leaders and official media tend to frame the country's single-party regime as a "people's democracy", which may cause confusion in villagers' understanding of democracy. For ordinary Chinese, the word "democracy (*minzhu*)" may have multiple interpretations, including liberal democracy, consultative leadership and benign autocracy. To avoid confusion, I use concrete survey questions to measure villagers' support for democracy.

[47] Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy; participation and opposition* (New Haven,: Yale University Press, 1971).

that the respondent supports contestation among candidates but opposes the extension of suffrage to all villagers. Second, township and county governments are the bottom tiers of China's administrative hierarchy. Ordinary villagers may obtain knowledge of them through processes of policy implementation, social networks and even direct interactions with local officials. Due to this proximity, it is relatively easier for villagers to form rational and stable opinions about local authorities than higher levels of the government.

Table 1 provides an overview of democratic support among respondents of the survey. Nearly half of the interviewees (48.3%) believe that direct elections are the best way to select local government leaders. In contrast, about one fourth of the respondents prefer indirect elections, while another 16 percent choose direct appointment by upper-level officials. Another 9 percent of respondents answer "don't care", probably suggesting that they are either uninterested in politics or cognitively incapable of making a choice.

[Table 1 about here.]

Political Trust

The trust enhancing effect argues that free and fair elections also reinforce citizens' confidence in government. Using two questions, the survey asked respondents to evaluate local officials' accountability and integrity as measures of political trust. The two questions are "do you agree that county and township officials truly represent and protect the lawful rights and interests of farmers?" and "do you believe in the integrity of county and township officials?" Both questions ask interviewees to choose a value

from 1 to 5, in which the value 5 represents strongly agree while the value 1 denotes strongly disagree.

Overall, the survey result suggests that respondents' confidence in local governments is not very high (Table 2). For both indicators, about half of respondents agreed that they trust country and township authorities, while 26 to 32 percent of respondents clearly expressed some levels of distrust. These proportions are close to those reported by other surveys, which also lends support to the validity of our measures.[48] I aggregate the two trust indicators using the following approach. First, by combining the two positive responses and also the two negative ones, I transform each trust indicator to one with the three values of trust (+1), neutral (0) and do not trust (-1). Then I add the two transformed indicators up to construct a composite trust index, which ranges from -2 to 2.

[Table 2 about here]

A Procedural Measure of Election Quality

The key explanatory variable of this research is the quality of the two most recent rounds of village elections, held in 2004-2005 and 2007-2008 respectively. I adopt a procedural measure of election quality.[49] More specifically, I use the

[48] Lianjiang Li, "Political Trust in Rural China," *Modern China* 30, no. 2 (2004); Li, "Distrust in Government Leaders, Demand for Leadership Change, and Preference for Popular Elections in Rural China."

[49] To be sure, fair and transparent procedures do not guarantee that elections are clean, let alone that elected officials will exercise power in a meaningful way, for example, see Kevin J. O'Brien and Rongbin Han, "Path to Democracy? Assessing Village Elections in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 18, no. 60 (2009). Local authorities can adopt many other strategies to manipulate election outcomes without explicitly distorting the procedures. However, given that direct interference in procedures is still a common phenomenon in village elections, I believe the fairness and transparency of procedures to some extent still capture the overall quality of these elections. See Melanie Manion, "How to Assess Village Elections in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 18, no. 60 (2009); Gunter

following three criteria to evaluate the representativeness, fairness and transparency of electoral procedures: 1) the openness of the candidate nomination process to ordinary voters, 2) the relative autonomy of the electoral process from interference by local governments and the ruling party and 3) the degree to which the voting process is insulated from electoral fraud. These procedural criteria are widely discussed in existing studies and regarded as essential to the overall fairness and transparency of village elections.[50]

Following the first criterion, the indicator of candidate nomination is coded as one for elections adopting "open sea nomination" and as zero otherwise.[51] "Open sea nomination" refers to a nomination process that each eligible voter receives a blank nomination ballot and writes down the name of the most preferred candidate he or she chooses from all adult villagers. This nomination method could reduce the arbitrariness of the candidate selection process and guarantees that only those who obtain sufficiently strong support from villages are eligible to compete in the final stage.

Schubert, "Studying 'Democratic' Governance in Contemporary China: Looking at the Village is not Enough," *Journal of Contemporary China* 18, no. 60 (2009).

[50] Birney, "China's Village Elections as a Mechanism for Political Stability Via Bounded Political Responsiveness." Kennedy, Rozelle, and Shi, "Elected Leaders and Collective Land: Farmers' Evaluation of Village Leaders' Performance in Rural China."; Robert Pastor and Qingshan Tan, "The Meaning of China's Village Elections," *China Quarterly*, no. 162 (2000); Manion, "Democracy, Community, Trust: The Impact of Elections in Rural China."; Fubing Su et al., "Clans, Electoral Procedures and Voter Turnout: Evidence from Villagers' Committee Elections in Transitional China," *Political Studies* 59, no. 2 (2011).

[51] Other nomination methods adopted in village elections include: nomination by villagers' small groups (*cunmin xiaozu*), nomination by villager or household representatives, nomination by party members, incumbent VC members or party branch members and nomination by township officials. As my fieldwork suggests, these nomination methods only involve a small number of participants, therefore are more likely to be manipulated or controlled by local officials or other social forces.

Second, I use an *ex post* indicator to gauge the relative autonomy of the electoral process from interference by local officials. The survey recorded whether township authorities explicitly intervened in the election by nominating candidates, directly appointing village leaders from final candidates or, in extreme cases, calling off the election. The indicator of interference takes the value one for elections without explicit township intervention and zero for manipulated ones. Third, I use whether the use of roving ballot boxes was prohibited to measure the transparency of the voting process. Since roving ballot boxes are often more difficult to monitor than fixed ones, using them to collect votes is more vulnerable to electoral frauds. For example, roving ballot boxes may induce unauthorized proxy voting behaviors, or even allow plotters of electoral fraud to stuff ballot boxes directly. Thus, prohibiting roving ballot boxes reduces undesirable interference and increases the transparency of the voting process.

Table 3 summarizes the quality of elections in sample villages by province and also by election year. Overall, election quality displays considerable variation across regions. For example, more than 90 percent villages in Jilin province adopted "open sea nomination" in the 2007/2008 election year. The proportion is 100 percent for "no township interference" and 71 percent for "no roving ballot boxes". In comparison, elections in Fujian province are poorer in fairness and transparency. Only ten percent villages prohibited the use of roving ballot boxes while not a single village nominates candidates by “open sea nomination”. Quality of procedures also varies by time. In the 2007/2008 election year, election quality improved in some villages, while deteriorated in others. The most notable case of deterioration occurred in

Sichuan province. Quality of both ballot box and township interference dramatically decreased. Many factors may contribute to the regional and temporal variations of electoral quality. For example, as discussed earlier, the decrease in Sichuan's election quality was mainly caused by provincial mandates to tighten the control over elections. A thorough discussion on the logic behind these variations is beyond the scope of this paper. To examine the attitudinal effects of these variations, I add up the three procedural indicators to form a composite index of election quality.

[Table 3 about here]

Statistical Models

I use two ordered probit models to test the two hypothesized effects of village elections. The dependent variables are villagers' trust in local governments and their support for democracy respectively. The key independent variable of both models is the quality of the most recent election in a village. I also put political trust on the right hand side of the second model to examine the indirect impact of election quality on support for democracy through political trust.[52]

Both models also seek to control theoretically important variables at both individual and village levels. Besides elections, performance of local governance may also shape villagers' trust in local governments. I use three variables to capture governance performance. First, a binary variable is generated to indicate whether the respondent experienced forceful land requisition by local governments in the past

[52] Li studies the relationship between political trust and support for democracy among Chinese villagers. His analysis suggests that political distrust leads to stronger support for democracy rather than the other way around. Following his approach, this research also puts political trust as the explanatory variable in the model of support for democracy. For more details, see Li, "Distrust in Government Leaders, Demand for Leadership Change, and Preference for Popular Elections in Rural China."

three years. In recent years, land requisition has become a pervasive phenomenon in rural China and has caused numerous disputes between governments and farmers. Therefore, I hypothesize that land requisition undermines villagers' trust in local authorities. The second performance variable is the total amount of fees levied by local governments in the year before the survey. While villagers have been exempted from the duty to pay formal agricultural taxes, some local governments still levy various types of administrative and resource fees, which increase villagers' burdens. I argue that fees have a negative impact on villagers' trust in local governments. Finally, village-level investment on public goods and services in the year before the survey is also controlled. Since village expenditure on public goods and services mostly relies on fiscal input by local governments, I expect more public investment to increase villagers' political trust.

The model also controls a series of individual characteristics, including age, education, gender, party membership, and village official status. Modernization theory asserts that income may affect individual's political attitudes. Unfortunately the survey did not collect household or individual income, thus I use village average income per capita as a rough substitute. Respondents' participatory behaviors (i.e. whether they voted or not in the most recent election) may also play a role. For example, Landry and coauthors write that "casting a ballot, observing how ballots are counted, and seeing whether the most vote getters are actually confirmed as election winners all shape individual perceptions of electoral fairness decisively".[53] I expect

[53] Landry, Davis, and Wang, "Elections in Rural China: Competition Without Parties."

vote participation to simultaneously increase political trust and support for democracy. Table 4 provides a detailed summary for all control variables.[54]

A Note on Endogeneity and the Instrument Variable (IV) Approach

Although using objective measures for election quality can mitigate the potential endogeneity problem, possibility still exists that the observed relationships are driven by causal mechanisms other than the hypothesized ones. For example, one may argue that democratic-minded villagers may block government interference and promote freer and fairer elections. Or alternatively, both electoral procedures and villages' political attitudes can have common but unobserved determinants, including but not limited to, village history, political culture and personal characteristics of incumbent village cadres. Or villagers that trust the government might be trusted by the government and thus be allowed cleaner elections.

The paper employs two empirical strategies to facilitate causal inference, thus providing more corroborating evidence for the hypothesized causal mechanisms. First, I use the lagged independent variable, namely the quality of the 2004/2005 elections, to attenuate the temporal simultaneity between the independent and dependent variables. Since the villages' political attitudes are measured three years after the 2004/2005 elections, it is less likely the case that political attitudes today affect past electoral procedures. However, the causal inference problem still exists if certain

[54] The above models control township fixed effects and report village-clustered standard error. Beside these baseline models, I also estimate three sets of alternatively specified models to establish the robustness of the result. First, I estimate a hierarchical model to control the random unobserved effects at the village level. Second, I use a multiple imputation method to fill in the missing values and "do not know" responses. Last, since the survey employed a multistage clustered sampling method, I also use sample weight to adjust for sampling effects. Results for these robustness checks are reported in Appendix B.

factors affect both electoral quality and political attitudes. Given this concern, I further adopt an instrument variable (IV) approach to facilitate causal inference.

The instrument variable used for the election quality of a sample village is the average quality of elections in the other counties of the same province.[55] The election quality of a sample village is correlated with the average quality of other counties in the same province because provincial governments often issue stipulations and directives about procedures to be used in all villages of the province. Although the extent to which these directives are strictly implemented in the actual elections vary case by case, procedures adopted in elections within a province does manifest some resemblance.[56] The correlation coefficient between the instrument and the instrumented is 0.45 for 2007/2008 and 0.40 for 2004/2005. Moreover, it is more reasonable to assume the exogeneity of the instrument variable given the fact that it is constructed using information from other counties.[57]

Results and Discussions

Table 5 and Table 6 report the estimation results of the two models. The first two columns of both tables use data from voters only, while the last two columns use all

[55] All individual-level control variables are excluded from the first stage regression since there is little theoretical reason to believe that these demographic variables affect electoral procedures.

[56] For example, the provincial government of Jilin explicitly issued a file in 2007 to promote the "open sea nomination" method in its jurisdiction. As a result, 19 out of 21 sample villages in the province use this nomination method in the subsequent election. Similarly, Fujian explicitly permitted using roving ballot boxes because it could ease the voting process and increase turnout rates in the mountainous province. As a consequence, only two out of 19 villages in our sample did not use roving ballot boxes in the election and the proportion is much lower than in other provinces.

[57] The selected instrument variable should satisfy a critical condition, namely, the instrument variable should affect the dependent variable only through the instrumented independent variable. In this research, the quality of elections in a village should not affect political attitudes of villagers in other counties. In theory, such effects might exist, but they should be not detrimental since the selected five countries in each province are all non-adjacent, therefore villagers in the sample county should have little knowledge about the average quality of elections in other counties. Nevertheless, I admit the potential limitations of the instrument variable and claim it only useful for suggestive rather than conclusive causality inferences.

respondents, including both voters and non-voters. I make this distinction to see whether the hypothesized effects of elections are stronger among voters than non-voters. However, since only 10 percent of respondents did not vote in the most recent election, analyzing non-voters independently faces the problem of a small sample size. Thus instead of using non-voter sample only, the last two columns of both tables combine voters and non-voters and control their voting behaviors (i.e. a vote variable to indicate whether the respondent voted or not) for a rough comparison.

[Table 5 and 6 about here.]

Overall, these results confirm both the trust enhancing effect and the democratic training effect. As the two tables show, elections with higher quality are associated with more confidence in local governments but also stronger support for democracy. As expected, the effects are slightly greater for the voter sample. In addition, quality of past elections also demonstrates a strong and significant impact, suggesting that the two hypothesized effects are persistent and stable. The effects of past elections also show that political trust and support for democracy may have undergone a gradual evolution process, in which both recent events and historical experiences play a role. Substantively, the marginal effect of the electoral quality index on political trust is between 0.14 and 0.21. In other words, one unit increase in electoral quality can boost individual trust by 0.14 to 0.21 units.[58] The marginal effect of electoral quality on support for democracy is between 0.07 and 0.1. At a first glance, both effects seem to be small in magnitude. However, electoral quality is a

[58] I calculate the marginal effect based the ordinary least square model rather than the order probit model to make interpretation more straightforward.

village-level variable, which means one unit increase of electoral quality would lift the average trust level of all villagers by 0.14 to 0.21 units. This effect is non-trivial given the fact that the standard deviation of the average trust level across villages is 0.5 and the standard deviation of the average support for democracy is 0.2, as the data shows.

The coefficients on the vote variable also lend support, at least indirectly, to the hypothesized arguments. In average, voters display both greater political trust and democratic support compared with non-voters, suggesting that voting in elections may also shape villages' political attitudes. However, the finding should not be overemphasized for two reasons. First, the empirical evidence seems weak. The vote variable is only marginally significant in Table 5 and Table 6 and becomes insignificant in models with other specifications. Second, it is also possible that individual voting behaviors are simultaneously affected by the dependent variables of the model, namely, political trust and support for democracy. Without additional identification strategies, it will be difficult to establish the direction of the causality.

Among control variables, two of the three governance performance variables are consistent with earlier predictions, although the impact of village public investment per capita is only marginally significant. Land requisitions by local governments exert a negative influence on political trust with a marginal effect 0.5, the greatest impact among all independent variables in the trust model. This result confirms the scholarly observation that land requisitions have become a serious threat to social stability and regime popularity in today's China. Investment on public goods

and services increases villagers' confidence in local authorities. Finally, fees paid by respondents have insignificant impact on political trust, though the direction of such impact is in line with the hypothesis.

Demographic factors also matter. Trust level is higher among older generations than younger ones, which reflects a declining trend of trust in local governments among Chinese villagers. In addition, political trust is lower among male and more educated respondents. This is probably because these people have more political efficacy and therefore less susceptible to the ideological propaganda of state controlled media. Finally, CCP members and incumbent village officials tend to trust local authorities more than ordinary villagers.

Table 6 also shows that political trust is negatively correlated with support for democracy, suggesting that more trusting people have stronger support for the current regime and less demand for systemic change.[59] The negative correlation between political trust and support for democracy adequately illustrates the dilemma of autocrats, namely, while authoritarian rulers prefer stronger regime support and less social demand for democratic transitions, elections cannot simultaneously serve the two goals. Free and fair elections do induce regime support, but the precondition is that the regime is willing to keep its promise of further democratic reform since elections have taught citizens to embrace the competitive political institution. Among other possible accounts of villagers' support for democracy, age and education are

[59] This result is consistent to the finding of existing studies. For details, see Li, "Distrust in Government Leaders, Demand for Leadership Change, and Preference for Popular Elections in Rural China."

statistically significant. Compared with older generations, younger villagers have higher support for democracy. An unexpected result comes from the variable of education. Contrary to the predication of modernization theory, I find that more educated people have significantly less support for democracy. Combining this with the previous result that education has a negative impact on political trust, I find that more educated villagers tend to be dissatisfied with the incumbent government but unwilling to change the status quo. Average income *per capita* does not increase villagers' support either. One tentative reason for the failure of modernization theory in the context of rural China is that more educated people and economic elites in authoritarian societies are also the primary beneficiaries of the ruling regime. As such, they should have lower incentives than ordinary people to call for a change. In any case, a rigorous test of this logic requires further research.

The instrument variable approach provides further evidence for the hypothesized causal directions (Table 7). However, it needs to be pointed out that the potential drawbacks of the selected instrument variable may limit its validity. Moreover, other causal mechanisms may still apply, given the complex interactions among quality of elections, political trust and support for democracy both in theory and in reality.

Autocrats' Dilemma: A Concluding Remark on Authoritarian Elections

A majority of authoritarian regimes in the world hold competitive national or local elections, an institution conventionally regarded as the defining feature of democracy. It remains an ongoing debate whether elections are simply a manifestation of existing

power relationships or are playing an independent role in shaping the political interaction among the ruling elites of the regime. However, few studies have systematically examined the role of authoritarian elections from a public opinion perspective. Drawing on the experience of village elections in China, this paper analyzes the potential impacts of elections on ordinary people's trust in the authoritarian government and their support for democratic institutions. Using different modeling strategies, the empirical analysis of this paper consistently finds that free and fair village elections simultaneously increase Chinese people's political trust and their support for democracy. This result is compatible with the recent scholarly discussion about the political impacts of village elections on China's state-society relationship from the voter's perspective.[60]

The findings of this paper may shed lights on the resilience and breakdown of authoritarian regimes. By establishing an image of trustworthiness for the authoritarian government, competitive and representative institutions may allow authoritarian rulers to lift regime popularity and to some extent muffle the breakout of social discontent. One implication of this finding is that liberalized authoritarian regimes may not be inherently unstable *per se*, since liberalization policies themselves could serve as a safety valve to protect the authoritarian rule.

However, authoritarian elections may also introduce some uncertainty to the ruling regime. This is because the legitimacy-enhancing role of elections requires the authoritarian government to set up relatively free and fair electoral procedures, allow

[60] Kennedy, "Legitimacy with Chinese Characteristics: 'two increases, one reduction'."; Landry, Davis, and Wang, "Elections in Rural China: Competition Without Parties."

for genuine electoral competition and grant voters at least limited political rights. As the experience of PRI in Mexico suggests, although government sponsored candidates may gain short-term advantages in the race by manipulating the rules and processes of elections, opposition parties and social groups can still exploit the opportunity of liberalization to pursue authentic political clout and even the central leadership. In China, competitive elections at the village level have not yet achieved any political influence strong enough to shake the monolithic rule of the single-party regime. Nevertheless, they have provided a training ground for voters to learn the merits of the representative political institution. Villagers who have gone through this positive training are demonstrating a greater demand for the extension of competitive elections into higher governments. In this sense, the democratic training local elections have offered may gradually contribute to the formation of a relatively liberal and democratic culture.

The dual effects suggest that authoritarian elections should not be viewed as the "Lid of Pandora's Box" that unleashes irreversible regime changes.[61] They are neither a window-dressing for authoritarian rulers to build a harmless facade of democracy. For those authoritarian regimes that adopt liberalizing policies to appease social discontent but concerned with the potential backfiring consequences of them, competitive elections may constitute a dilemma. They need to make a prudent choice between sponsoring the election and rigging it, balancing how much to gain and how much to lose. And the choice they make and its succeeding impacts might shape the

[61] Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an age of democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

political landscape of their regimes. Even in the Chinese context where elected local officials seems to pose no direct and immediate threats to the ruling Party, opening free and fair local elections may trigger greater demand for further empowerment among citizens. Such demand, as the work of Bruce Gilley suggests, may raise the question of whether the Communist Party should revise its norms and institutions in favor of sharing more political power.[62]

[62] Bruce Gilley, "The Limits of Authoritarian Resilience," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003).

Table 1: Statistical Description of Support for Democracy

What is the best way to selection township and county government leaders	Percentage *(N=2272)*
Elected though popular elections (3)	48.02
Elected by representatives (2)	25.53
Appointed (1)	15.49
I don't care	8.45
Non-response	2.49

1. Data source: 2008 survey;
2. Entries may not add up to 100 due to rounding errors.

Table 2: Statistical Description of Political Trust

Trust in local governments	Percentage (*N=2272*)	
	Accountability	Integrity
Very much (2)	19.76	11.05
Somewhat (1)	33.54	39.13
So-so (0)	12.41	17.25
Not quite (-1)	19.15	17.91
Not at all (-2)	12.24	8.10
Non-response	2.91	6.55

1. Data source: 2008 survey;
2. Entries may not add up to 100 due to rounding errors.

Table 3: Quality of Elections by Province and by Election Year (N=114)

	Proportion of Sample Villages Satisfying Democratic Criteria					
	Jiangsu	Sichuan	Shaanxi	Jilin	Hebei	Fujian
2007/2008 election						
Open Sea Nomination	32%	17%	38%	91%	40%	0%
No Interference	84%	22%	63%	100%	65%	70%
No Roving Ballot box	47%	56%	25%	71%	40%	10%
2004/2005 election						
Open Sea Nomination	58%	11%	19%	86%	35%	0%
No Interference	96%	83%	75%	95%	60%	60%
No Roving Ballot box	47%	78%	25%	62%	40%	5%
Number of Villages	19	18	16	21	20	20

1. Data source: 2005 and 2008 surveys;
2. Entries may not add up to 100 due to rounding errors.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Control Variables

Variable	# of Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Individual level					
Age (year)	2272	50.1	11.5	19	87
Education (year)	2272	6.2	3.3	0	16
Gender	2272	0.6	0.5	0	1
Village Cadre	2272	0.1	0.3	0	1
CCP Member	2272	0.1	0.3	0	1
Land Requisition	2272	0.1	0.3	0	1
Village level					
Fees (*Yuan*)	2272	356.1	2340	0	73500
Village Public Investment per capita (*Yuan*)	2272	6.7	12.6	0	72.73
Village Average Income per capita (Thousand *Yuan*)	2272	4	2.3	0.2	13

1. Data source: 2008 survey.

Table5: Explaining Political Trust

	Political Trust (-2-2)			
	Voters Only		All Respondents	
Election Quality (07/08)	0.134**		0.121**	
0-3	(0.06)		(0.05)	
Election Quality (04/05)		0.163***		0.137***
0-3		(0.06)		(0.05)
Vote			0.144*	0.138*
1=yes; 0=no			(0.08)	(0.08)
Fee (log)	-0.007	-0.008	-0.005	-0.006
Yuan	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Public Investment (log)	0.014	0.013	0.018*	0.018
Yuan	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Land Requisition	-0.287**	-0.284**	-0.266**	-0.262**
1=yes; 0=no	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Age	0.007**	0.007**	0.007***	0.007***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	-0.029***	-0.028**	-0.024**	-0.023**
Year	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender	-0.284***	-0.281***	-0.251***	-0.250***
1=male; 0=female	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Cadre	0.132	0.123	0.090	0.085
1=yes; 0=no	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
CCP Member	0.168*	0.178**	0.155**	0.160**
1=yes; 0=no	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Village Income per capita (log)	0.074	0.138	0.050	0.109
Thousand Yuan	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Cut-off point 1	-0.801***	-0.508*	-0.606**	-0.367
	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.25)
Cut-off point 2	-0.499*	-0.206	-0.306	-0.067
	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.25)
Cut-off point 3	0.042	0.336	0.258	0.497**
	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.25)
Cut-off point 4	0.449*	0.742***	0.654***	0.893***
	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.26)
Number of observations	1670	1670	1867	1867

1. Standard errors clustered at the village level are in parentheses;
2. * Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%;
3. Fixed effects at the township level are controlled but omitted from the table.

Table 6: Explaining Support for Democracy

	Support for Democracy (1-3)			
	Voters Only		All Respondents	
Political Trust	-0.059***	-0.059***	-0.049***	-0.049***
-2-2	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Election Quality (07/08)	0.106***		0.107***	
0-3	(0.04)		(0.04)	
Election Quality (04/05)		0.163***		0.167***
0-3		(0.03)		(0.04)
Vote			0.166*	0.158*
1=yes; 0=no			(0.10)	(0.09)
Age	-0.012***	-0.012***	-0.012***	-0.012***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	-0.034***	-0.033***	-0.028***	-0.027***
Year	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender	0.009	0.012	0.020	0.022
1=male; 0=female	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Cadre	-0.109	-0.118	-0.124	-0.131
1=yes; 0=no	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)
CCP Member	-0.051	-0.041	-0.060	-0.054
1=yes; 0=no	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Village Income per capita (log)	-0.039	0.013	-0.056	-0.001
Thousand Yuan	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.09)
Cut-off point 1	-1.730***	-1.427***	-1.480***	-1.174***
	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.27)
Cut-off point 2	-0.842***	-0.538**	-0.594**	-0.286
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.26)
Number of observations	1670	1670	1867	1867

1. Standard errors clustered at the village level are in parentheses;
2. * Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%;
3. Fixed effects at the township level are controlled but omitted from the table.

Table 7: Results for the Instrument Variable (2SLS) Model, All Respondents

	All Respondents	
	Political Trust	Support for Democracy
Electoral Quality (07/08)	0.167**	0.057*
0-3	(0.07)	(0.03)
Political Trust		-0.027**
-2-2		(0.01)
Vote	0.166	0.091
1=yes; 0=no	(0.11)	(0.06)
Fee (log)	-0.005	
Yuan	(0.01)	
Public Investment (log)	0.016	
Yuan	(0.01)	
Land Requisition	-0.426***	
1=yes; 0=no	(0.14)	
Age	0.010**	-0.007***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	-0.031**	-0.016**
Year	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender	-0.292***	0.012
1=male; 0=female	(0.08)	(0.04)
Cadre	0.098	-0.074
1=yes; 0=no	(0.10)	(0.05)
CCP Member	0.195**	-0.035
1=yes; 0=no	(0.10)	(0.06)
Village Income per capita (log)	0.066	0.021
Thousand Yuan	(0.15)	(0.08)
Constant	-0.072	2.708***
	(0.33)	(0.16)
R-square	0.099	0.046
N.	1867	1867

1. Standard errors clustered at the village level are in parentheses;
2. * Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%;
3. The instrument variable is the average quality of elections in other counties of the sample province

Appendix A: Survey Design

The survey data used in the paper comes from a two-round survey of village elections conducted in six provinces in 2005 and 2008. To obtain a representative sample, the survey team adopted the following procedures: We first divided the country into six major geographical regions, and from each region randomly selected one province: Fujian, Hebei, Jiangsu, Jilin, Shaanxi, and Sichuan were the sample provinces. Below the provincial level, we adopted a multistage random sampling approach. More specifically, we first ranked all counties of each province according to their industrial output value and selected five counties out of the list using the systematic sampling method. Then we randomly chose two townships from each sample county and two villages from each sample township. At the villager level, 25 households were randomly selected from the official household registration list provided by village accountants.[63] Then in each household we randomly chose one interviewee from all adult family members. One interviewer went to his or her family to conduct the interview and to fill out a standardized questionnaire including demographic information of all family members and subjective questions to be answered by the selected interviewee.

The survey also collected information on sample villages, including their socioeconomic conditions and the electoral procedures adopted in village elections. Specifically, the survey team interviewed one of the three leading cadres, namely

[63] Our planned sample size in each village was 20. However, considering possible non-responses (e.g. not at home, health problems etc.), we sampled 25 villagers in each village to guarantee that about 20 individual samples can be obtained.

party secretary, villagers' committee chairman or village accountant to gather village socioeconomic information. Then a group of three village elites, often prestigious villagers, electoral committee members or candidates of the most recent elections, was interviewed together. They were asked to recall the specific procedures adopted in the elections. Based on their description, interviewers filled out a standardized questionnaire to record how elections were conducted. In cases when village elites gave conflicting answers, we separately asked a few ordinary villagers to describe the electoral procedures for the purpose of cross-validation.

Appendix B: Some Robustness Checks for the Results

This appendix tests models with alternative specifications as robustness checks for the above findings. First, since both dependent variables contain some "don't know" and missing responses, I employ a multiple imputation approach based on the assumption that the data is missing at random (MAR). Ten imputed data sets are generated using an Expected Maximization (EM) algorithm. Then each data set is independently analyzed and the estimates are combined into a final result (Table B1). Second, the model includes explanatory variables at both individual and village levels, therefore it could only control fixed unobserved effects at the township level. Given this concern, I estimate a hierarchical model to simultaneously control both township fixed effects and village random effects (Table B2).[64] Third, since the survey adopted a multi-stage cluster sampling method, I use a model that adjusts for the sampling design by adding sample weights and calculating clustered standard errors (Table B3). The sample weight assigned to each individual respondent is the reciprocal of the probability of this individual being selected according to the sampling design. Overall, these models report very similar results with the baseline model, suggesting the main findings of the paper are highly robust.

[Table B1-B3 about here]

[64] Andrew Gelman and Jennifer Hill, *Data analysis using regression and multilevel/hierarchical models*, Analytical methods for social research (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Table B1: Results for the Multiple Imputation Model

	All Respondents			
	Political Trust		Support for Democracy	
Election Quality (07/08)	0.087*		0.089**	
0-3	(0.05)		(0.04)	
Election Quality (04/05)		0.091**		0.115***
0-3		(0.04)		(0.04)
Political Trust			-0.052***	-0.052***
-2-2			(0.02)	(0.02)
Vote	0.104	0.102	0.149	0.146
1=yes; 0=no	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Fee (log)	-0.006	-0.007		
Yuan	(0.01)	(0.01)		
Public Investment (log)	0.023**	0.022**		
Yuan	(0.01)	(0.01)		
Land Requisition	-0.257**	-0.253**		
1=yes; 0=no	(0.10)	(0.10)		
Age	0.007**	0.006**	-0.011***	-0.011***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	-0.020**	-0.019**	-0.026***	-0.025**
Year	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender	-0.240***	-0.237***	0.004	0.008
1=male; 0=female	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Cadre	0.090	0.085	-0.138*	-0.144*
1=yes; 0=no	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
CCP Member	0.157**	0.160**	-0.067	-0.062
1=yes; 0=no	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Village Income per capita (log)	0.105	0.144*	-0.048	-0.007
Thousand Yuan	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.09)
N.	2272	2272	2272	2272

1. Standard errors clustered at the village level are in parentheses;
2. * Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%;
3. Fixed effects at the township level are controlled but omitted from the table.

Table B2: Results Adjusted for Survey Design

	All Respondents			
	Political Trust		Support for Democracy	
Election Quality (07/08)	0.178***		0.088***	
0-3	(0.06)		(0.03)	
Election Quality (04/05)		0.154**		0.146***
0-3		(0.06)		(0.04)
Political Trust			-0.055**	-0.055**
-2-2			(0.02)	(0.02)
Vote	0.200*	0.195*	0.134	0.131
1=yes; 0=no	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Fee (log)	-0.010	-0.012*		
Yuan	(0.01)	(0.01)		
Public Investment (log)	0.024**	0.027**		
Yuan	(0.01)	(0.01)		
Land Requisition	-0.340***	-0.321**		
1=yes; 0=no	(0.13)	(0.13)		
Age	0.006	0.006	-0.007	-0.007
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Education	-0.031**	-0.030**	-0.022	-0.022
Year	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender	-0.319***	-0.313***	0.035	0.037
1=male; 0=female	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Cadre	0.123	0.118	-0.093	-0.096
1=yes; 0=no	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.09)
CCP Member	0.310***	0.304***	-0.067	-0.070
1=yes; 0=no	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Village Income per capita (log)	-0.021	0.069	-0.095	-0.044
Thousand Yuan	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.08)
N.	1867	1867	1867	1867

1. Standard errors clustered at the village level are in parentheses;
2. * Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%;
3. Fixed effects at the township level are controlled but omitted from the table.

Table B3: Results for the Hierarchical Model

	All Respondents			
	Political Trust		Support for Democracy	
Electoral Quality (07/08)	0.121**		0.107**	
0-3	(0.05)		(0.05)	
Electoral Quality (04/05)		0.137**		0.167***
0-3		(0.06)		(0.06)
Political Trust			-0.049**	-0.049***
-2-2			(0.02)	(0.02)
Vote	0.144*	0.138	0.166*	0.158*
1=yes; 0=no	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Fee (log)	-0.005	-0.006		
Yuan	(0.01)	(0.01)		
Public Investment (log)	0.018*	0.018		
Yuan	(0.01)	(0.01)		
Land Requisition	-0.266***	-0.262***		
1=yes; 0=no	(0.09)	(0.09)		
Age	0.007***	0.007***	-0.012***	-0.012***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	-0.024**	-0.023**	-0.028***	-0.027***
Year	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender	-0.251***	-0.250***	0.020	0.022
1=male; 0=female	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Cadre	0.090	0.085	-0.124	-0.131
1=yes; 0=no	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
CCP Member	0.155*	0.160*	-0.060	-0.054
1=yes; 0=no	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Village Income per capita (log)	0.050	0.109	-0.056	-0.001
Yuan	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)
N.	1867	1867	1867	1867

1. Standard errors clustered at the village level are in parentheses;
2. * Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%;
3. Township fixed effects and village random effects are controlled but omitted from the table.